

Ritte backs, others balk

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Hotel dispute splits Molokai activists

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KAUNAKAKAI — The Hui Alaloa organization on Molokai has been split by a move by Walter Ritte Jr. to negotiate a settlement with a hotel developer that includes payment of \$200,000 for "Hawaiian cultural preservation and enhancement."

Ritte and some members of Hui Alaloa agreed to withdraw a petition before the Maui Planning Commission to intervene in a special management area permit hearing for the proposed Kaiaka Rock Hotel at Kaluakoi.

Other Hui Alaloa members vow they will continue the intervention case.

Hui Alaloa is largely a volunteer organization made up of is-

land residents who in the mid-1970s sought a platform from which to express concerns about development encroaching on the island's rural lifestyle.

An attorney involved with the organization said it has no constitution, bylaws or other written rules of procedure.

The group's early efforts to open up beach access along the island's west coast were successful, partly because of the assistance of then-Maui Mayor Elmer Cravalho in negotiations with property owner Molokai Ranch.

Now two of the original leaders of Hui Alaloa are on opposite sides of the split over the Kaiaka Rock Hotel — Ritte and Dr. Emmett Aluli, another longtime Hawaiian activist. Both Ritte and Aluli, a Molokai

physician, also are deeply involved in Protect Kahoolawe Ohana, a group which has long sought to wrest control of Kahoolawe from the military.

Aluli opposes construction of the Kaiaka hotel.

The issue may come to a head Friday when a pre-hearing conference is held by hearing officer Stanley Okamoto. The parties are Kaiaka Associates, headed by brothers Stephen and John Thomas, Hui Alaloa and the Molokai Homestead Farmers Association.

The Thomas brothers want to build a 375-room luxury hotel at Puu Kaiaka, a rocky outcropping overlooking the ocean between Papohaku and Kepuhi beaches at the west Molokai resort.

Hui Alaloa and the farmers

group intervened on the Kaiaka SMA request because of concerns over water, housing for employees, protection of a reputed heiau site and the need for a hotel. Planning commissioners first denied the intervention request, then reversed themselves and allowed it.

On Dec. 26, Ritte wrote to the planning department, saying he was elected president of Hui Alaloa and was withdrawing the intervention request. Ritte's letter included numerous documents including an apparent agreement signed by Stephen Thomas and Ritte and dated Dec. 18.

The Dec. 18 agreement says Kaiaka Associates would provide an access trail to Kepuhi and Papohaku beaches, install a plaque and model of the heiau

designated as site 41, allow further archaeological studies and salvage work and set up a "Hawaiian cultural fund" with \$200,000 to be paid over four years.

In his letter, Ritte said the move to withdraw from intervention is dependent on "the terms of our agreements becoming conditions of Kaiaka's SMA petition." Ritte was not available to comment on his letter yesterday.

Judy Napoleon, a Hui Alaloa leader who has been involved in the intervention move, said she and others "have been talking to him (Ritte)" but have not resolved their differences. "What we have is an agree-

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ment to disagree," she said.

Thus, both Ritte and Napoleon are expected to be at the pre-hearing conference Friday where the major issue is going to be who really represents Hui Alaloa.

In the 10 years that the community organization has been operating on Molokai, there never has been an elected president. At one time, Ritte was called a chairman, but there were no formal officers.

According to documents filed by Ritte, he was elected president of Hui Alaloa at a meeting with 17 people Dec. 20. The agreement with the Thomases was approved at the same meeting. But opponents say the meeting involved a large number of Ritte's family. They also claim that Walter Mendes, who was elected vice president, was not at the meeting.

Napoleon said Hui Alaloa members adamantly oppose construction of a hotel on the heiau site, feel Ritte has no guarantees in the agreement with the Thomases and have serious questions about the \$200,000 fund.

"It's not proper to put anything on Puu Kaiaka because of

the heiau. We feel the ground is sacred," she said.

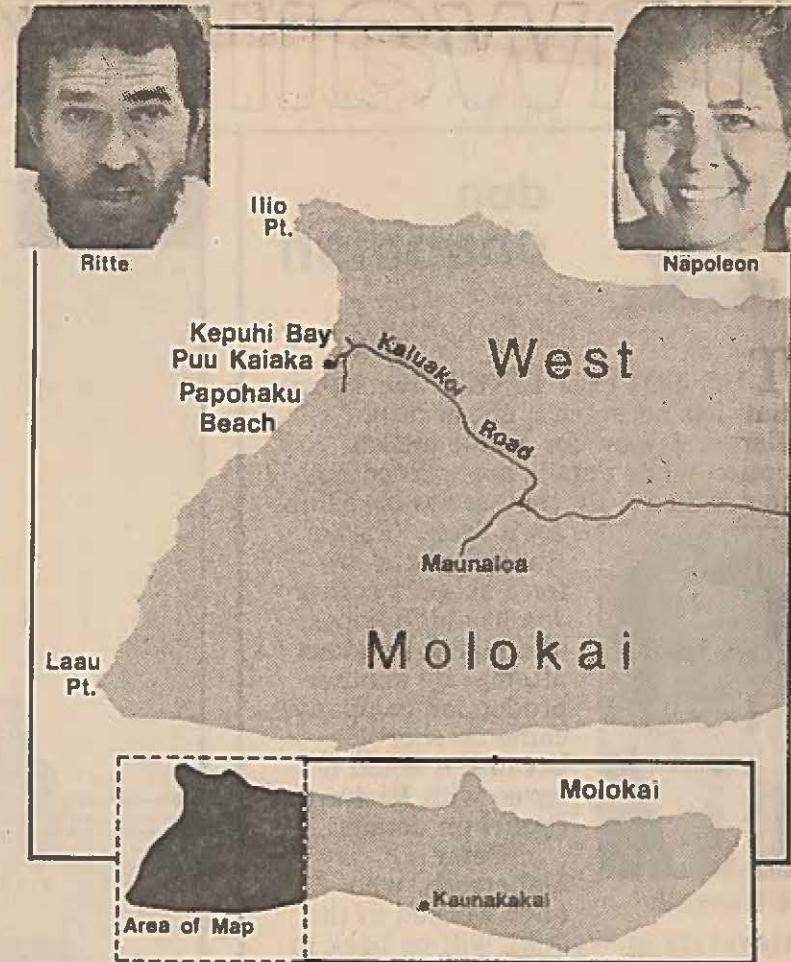
She said Ritte himself told them "there are no guarantees." Ritte is telling them "we can trust the Thomas brothers," but other members are not willing to do that, she said.

"The hardest part is the acceptance of money. Who's going to get it? Who's going to benefit? Who's going to control it," she said. "We have a lot of questions over the administration and use of it. What kind of control will the Thomas brothers have over it?"

Although she and other Hui Alaloa members oppose Ritte's attempt to negotiate concessions with the Thomases, Napoleon said they have not cut off all discussions with him. They just cannot support his position, she said.

"The feeling is we have been working with Walter a long time. To cut him up now is not fair," she said.

The split between Ritte and other Hui Alaloa leaders first began to open long before the petition to intervene was filed. At a meeting last year, Ritte took a position that the group should negotiate an agreement, while Napoleon and others wanted to intervene to stop the hotel project.



The key points appear to be preservation of the heiau site and Ritte's desire to acquire funds to implement a Hawaiian cultural plan developed while he was a trustee in the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. In October, Ritte made public his position of "trying to smooth the way" for developers on Molokai through negotiations rather

than adversarial hearings.

At the time, he said he felt developers are going to have problems with the community unless they are willing "to give something back."

"The bottom line is what is good for the residents is good for them (developers) because we're the ones they're making the money from," he said.

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